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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 004244

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CAIRO FOR AG COUNSELOR

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Jordan and Palestinians Welcome U.S./Israeli
Overture on Agricultural R&D Cooperation

¶11. SUMMARY: The Board of Directors of the U.S.-Israel Binational Agricultural Research and Development Fund (BARD) visited Jordan May 23-24 to discuss including Jordan and the Palestinian Authority in an expanded version of BARD dubbed MARD. A wide range of Palestinian and Jordanian officials and academics, including the Palestinian Minister of Agriculture and the Jordanian Minister of Agriculture (both of whom have scientific PhDs) warmly welcomed the concept. The next step is for the Chairman of the BARD Board (and USDA/ARS Administrator) Dr. Edward Knipling to write a letter to the Ministers of Agriculture in Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan asking for official points of contact so that the parties can begin looking for funding. END SUMMARY.

Background: Successful Science Cooperation Since 1977

¶12. BARD, operating since 1977, has a strong track record of supporting top-notch science. BARD is funded by income from a \$110 million endowment from the governments of the United States and Israel, and from additional annual contributions. In 2003, the BARD Board passed a resolution expressing its interest in augmenting its bilateral U.S.-Israel BARD program with a multilateral (U.S.-Israel-Jordan-Palestinian Authority) program, christened MARD (Multinational Agricultural R&D). MARD would not affect any operations or funding of BARD, although the administrative machinery and conceptual framework of BARD would be used for MARD. MARD would have a Board separate from the BARD Board. There was a BARD-sponsored scientist-to-scientist meeting in Turkey in 2004 to discuss the possibilities of collaboration between the four parties and to identify priorities. Numerous areas of common interest were identified, all having potential benefits to all four partners in the agricultural and environmental sectors. The May 23-24 discussions in Jordan thus represent the third step towards creating MARD.

Israelis Pony Up Their Share

¶13. At the May 22 BARD Board meeting in Tel Aviv, Israeli board members pushed to start MARD with a total of \$2 million, \$500,000 from each of the four parties. At the May 23 meeting in Jordan, Dr. Knipling said that this would be sufficient to fund three projects at \$200,000 each per year for three years. There was support from the participants for this approach, and recognition that finding the money was a difficult but not impossible task. The Israeli Ministry of Finance has already committed Israel's \$500,000 share, and there is partial USDA-ARS commitment, subject to match. (COMMENT: Israel has been seeking to expand BARD's endowment, and while wishing to protect the bilateral nature of BARD itself, sees MARD as an opportunity to attract new funding and carry out useful work with its immediate neighbors. END COMMENT.)

BARD Board Visits Jordan

¶14. Dr. Edward Knipling, Administrator (chief) of the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and newly-elected Chairman of the BARD Board, led a BARD Board delegation to Jordan on May 23-24 for discussions with Palestinian Authority and Jordanian officials and academics about the MARD concept. He was accompanied by the two other U.S. members of the BARD board: Purdue Vice-Provost for Engagement Dr. Vic Lechtenberg and Dean of the University of California Davis' College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Dr. Neal Van Alfen. Also participating were two Israeli BARD Board members: Ministry of Agriculture Chief Scientist Dr. Dan Levanon and Agricultural Research Organization (Volcani Institute) Director Dr. Eli Putievsky. The third Israeli member of the BARD Board is Ms Sivan Hector from the Israeli Ministry of Finance. Ms Hector participated in the May 22 BARD Board meeting in Tel Aviv but did not visit Jordan.

Wide Range of Parties Support MARD

¶15. The host for the Jordan visit was Dr. Abdel Nabi Fardous, Director General of the National Center for

Agricultural Research and Technology Transfer (NCARTT), the research arm of the Ministry of Agriculture. Dr. Fardous and Dr. Knipling co-chaired a five-hour meeting on May 23 at NCARTT at which representatives of USDA/ARS, the University of California Davis, the Agricultural Research Organization, NCARTT, Hebron University, the Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST), and BARD gave brief presentations on their respective organizations and their views on MARD. Palestinian Authority Minister of Agriculture Dr. Walid Abed Rabboh, a graduate of the University of Arizona, made an unscheduled intervention to express his support of MARD and for regional collaboration on agricultural issues.

16. While these organizations have different specialties and needs, presenters representing a wide range of Jordanian and Palestinian academe and officialdom stressed the value of cooperation and their desire to see MARD take shape. The May 23 meeting concluded after a proposal from the floor that BARD Chairman Dr. Knipling write a letter to the Ministers of Agriculture in Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority asking them to help bring MARD to life by appointing an official point of contact for MARD.

17. In a May 24 meeting with Jordanian Minister of Agriculture Yousef Shuraiki, Dr. Knipling summarized the plan for identifying official points of contact and moving quickly to identify funding for \$500,000 from each party for a four-way match so that projects can begin. Dr. Shuraiki endorsed the MARD proposal, saying it was "a good idea." He added that Jordanian scientists from the Ministry of Agriculture are already collaborating with Israeli colleagues on topics of mutual interest.

"We Are Committed to the United States"

18. COMMENT: The meeting and site visits went a long way towards convincing the Israelis not only of the depth of the Jordanian and Palestinian commitment, but also of their ability to work productively with Israeli and American colleagues. The peace-making aspects of scientific cooperation were never far from peoples' minds, despite the focus on science. Palestinian PhD holders from Washington State University, the University of Kansas, UC-Davis and other U.S. universities will take the lead in creating research and reconciliation with Israel. Many of these people already have personal connections in the region; MARD will capitalize on that by broadening and institutionalizing these contacts. The U.S. role, as usual, will remain pivotal.

19. USDA/ARS Administrator Knipling and Embassy Tel Aviv cleared this message.

HALE